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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a history of course and teacher evaluation procedures and proposes methods to make such evaluations effective. It is stated that some teacher rating procedures ignore the student's responsibility to learn. Reference is made to the "Joint Statement on Rights and Freedom of Students," which while upholding the right of a student's freedom of expression, further insists that he is responsible for learning the content of any course of study in which he is enrolled. To balance out the one-sided nature of course evaluations, different instruments, including various taxonomies, and possible student self-inventory questions are suggested. Teacher self-inventory and the provision of all evaluation results to students are also recommended. (JA)

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STUDENT EDUCATIONAL SELF-INVENTORY: ESTABLISHING A RATIONALE.

The University of California at Berkeley campus crisis in 1964 represented the first major student confrontation in a series that would take place at hundreds of campuses nationwide. All of these incidents reflected the latent problems that existed in higher education. A primary focus of controversy was the increasing dissatisfaction with the quality of undergraduate (primarily lower division) instruction. Calls were made for student participation in educational policy formation; "innovation," "relevance," and "reform" were the key words on the campus and soon were echoed at professional, academic, and administrative meetings.

Until 1965, the number of colleges and universities were relatively few which had put the idea of course and instructor evaluation into practice. It is true that there never has been an absence of critiques of teachers and teaching, but only recently has student opinion been considered to hold any legitimacy. At campuses around the country, course and teacher evaluation booklets are proliferating, sometimes with the approval of the faculty and administration, but often without it.

The notion of having the consumers of the educative process, the students, rate the effectiveness of their instruction can be traced to 1924 when a Confidential Guide to Courses was initiated at Harvard University. The Third National Student Congress in 1949 gave its backing to the concept of having students rate faculty members.

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Other leading institutions that have long conducted such programs include Michigan State, Purdue, Bennington, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Missouri. At the University of Texas and Boston Universtity, students publish two of the largest and most detailed of course evaluation booklets. The University of Washington has conducted campuswide course evaluations since 1924-25; an Office of Student Ratings is supported by that university.[1]

An example of a closer exchange of student and faculty evaluation is conducted at the Harvard School of Education. Here student instructional appraisals are sent to the instructors for comment. Then both students' and teachers' remarks are printed together in a booklet called Student-Faculty Dialogue on Courses. This is one attempt to permit the evaluatee, the instructor, to have a public response to the evaluation he receives.

Kent,[2] in a 1966 survey for the American Council on Education to ascertain current techniques for the evaluation of undergraduate instruction, analyzed 1,110 usable responses from undergraduate deans of colleges across the United States. Some of the rating forms involved the student in a partial responsibility for the learning situation rather than as a passive recipient. Some of the items of this type were: "How has your attitude been in class?" "I have a clear idea of the value of my work in this class and would now know how to make it better." Yet, these types of self-evaluative items appeared very seldom

In December, 1970, the Institute for Higher Education at the University of Pittsburgh conducted a conference on student evaluation

of teaching. Fahey[3] listed some seventeen assumptions connected with this practice. One of the assumptions challenged was; "That the effectiveness of a teacher can be rated apart from the receptiveness and responsibilities of the students who rate him. While there may be precedent, I have not seen a teacher rating procedure which obligates the rater to qualify his ratings according to the nature of his contribution to the teaching-learning situation, his motivation, his diligence, his readiness."

Robinson[4] has suggested, "Every teacher, if he is to assume his leadership role, must impose some responsibility on his students. The most difficult condition to impose--both for the teacher and the student--and the most valuable, is the responsibility of the student for his own effort, his own progress, and his own evaluation." Moffett[5] has stated "Whenever the learner cares less about evaluating his learning than someone else does, then the educational system is already in grave trouble, and we have a clue to why it is."

Hyman[6] has written, "Furthermore, it is also unreasonable to use learning achievements of the student as the sole data upon which to evaluate the teacher's accomplishments. The teacher inevitably teaches, but it is the student who must learn. If the student does not cooperate or expend the necessary effort and hence does not learn what the teacher intends for him to learn, it is unfair to fault the teaching. That is, it seems unjustified to evaluate teaching according to the performance of someone other than the teacher when certain factors affecting that person's performance may be completely beyond the teacher's control. In evalmating teaching the evaluator must consider many types of data other than learning achieved by the student."

In June, 1967, a joint committee, comprised of representatives from the American Association of University Professors, U. S. National Student Association, Association of American Colleges, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and, National Association of Women Deans and Counselors drafted the Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students. Since the formulation of the Joint Statement, it has been endorsed in principle by each of these five national sponsors, as well as by five other professional bodies. Various provisions of the position paper have been widely adopted or incorporated into student or institutional rules and regulations and, moreover, the courts have followed these guidelines.[7]

Contained in the Joint Statement are a preamble and provisions regarding student freedoms and responsibilities in (a) Freedom of Access to Higher Education, (b) In the Classroom, (c) Student Records, (d) Student Affairs, (e) Off-Campus Freedom of Students and, (f) Procedural Standards in Disciplinary Proceedings. Stated in (b) In the Classroom under section A--Protection of Freedom of Expression--is "Student should be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgments about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled. Section B--Protection Against Improper Academic Evaluation--states "Students should have protection through orderly procedures against prejudiced or capricious academic evaluation. At the same time, they are responsible for maintaining standards of academic performance established for each course in which they are enrolled. (underlining added)

The opinions of those who eat the pudding certainly ought to be considered if we wish to know how the pudding tastes. On balance, it seems logical that the judgment of students should be considered as part of that process for evaluating teaching and teachers. Yet, this represents only one half of the equation of responsibility in learning. This is the heart of our problem. We purport to rate effectiveness of an interaction between student and instructor by describing only one side of the exchange.

A primary instrument for the development of items for evaluating teaching and the teacher is a 1962 booklet prepared by Simpson and Seidman[8] for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. The material is arranged so that the instructor can develop his own evaluative tool for student use. A smorgasbord of 291 illustrative items are available for selection and are devised as open-ended statements, checklists, and rating scales. Eleven areas of assessment are included along with a section for introductory identifying data on the respondent.

A similar instrument needs to be developed for the inventorying of student's imput, commitment, and assumption of the responsiblity for the learning process and classroom progress. The taxonomies[9,10] for both the cognitive and affective outcomes of education contain a detailed classification system which would suggest possible objectives that might be included in such an evaluative tool. Two other works that provide a base for the development of a student self-inventory booklet are those of Sawin[11] and Scriven.[12]

The areas of investigation that learners might be asked to assess are similar to those found currently on teacher and course evaluation forms.

More specifically, areas for self-evaluation would likely include questions dealing with: (a) identifying data and information, (b) learning readiness, (c) attitudes toward learning, (d) attitudes toward students, (e) instructor contact, (f) course preparation and organization, (g) study and class preparation, (h) out-of-class learning processes and procedures, (i) study aids and activities and, (j) overall evaluation of input. A bank of such inventory items could be presented in booklet form so each instructor could design an instrument appropriate to the uniqueness of his classes.

Once an appropriate set of student self-inventory questions has been identified, perhaps between fifteen or twenty statements, then an explanation of the purpose of the exercise should be made to class members. Hopefully, the respondents sense the overall value of the instrument but a special effort should be made to motivate the students to answer the questions thoughtfully and honestly. The items should be written in student language so that interpretative problems are held to a minimum and student anonymity should be protected. The instrument should be administered without the presence of the instructor. A student should be designated to administer, collect, and return the completed forms to the departmental office.

The use of optical scanner or IBM type answer sheets will permit an efficient reporting of the results. A printout could include such information as percentages, means, and standard deviations to the set of responses provided by the students. The important elements are that the individual student will have completed a self-inventory and that an overall classroom profile can be obtained. The instructor should include

feedback to the class of the results of the self-inventory instrument. Concurrent with the process of student self-evaluation might be the distribution of the traditional course evaluation forms for the students to complete. Those results may also be reported by the instructor since the revelation of that profile may well temper student interpretations and change perceptions.

Ideally, both constituencies--students and instructor--will do a self-inventory of his individual contributions to the progress of learning in the class. No assurance can be given that changes will occur as a result of this exercise, but each party will privately know of his efforts to contribute to the successful learning in the course. A shortened version of a student self-inventory tool can also be administered at selected and timely points during the course. A series of such efforts would permit the plotting of progress during the length of the course on the behalf of the students.

The concept of measuring student input in the overall efforts to advance learning and the instructional process is, of course, not a panacea. Learning, by its very nature, is a private personal affair between the learner and the educational stimuli presented to him both formally and informally. But gained may be that the student has recognized and been reminded that learning does not just happen. He has to be actively involved in the experience and that carries with it a responsibility that is shared jointly between him and his instructor.

Footnotes

1. Philip Werdell, Course and Teacher Evaluation: A Student's Confidential Guide (Washington: United States National Student Association, 1966), p. 1.

2. Laura Kent, "Student Evaluation of Teaching," Improving College Teaching, ed. Calvin B. T. Lee (Washington: American Council on Education, 1967), pp. 312-343.

3. George L. Fahey, "Student Rating of Teaching, Some Questionable Assumptions," Student Evaluation of Teaching--Presentations at A Conference (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, December, 1970), p. 15.

4. Donald W. Robinson, "Scraps from a Teacher's Notebook," Phi Delta Kappan, October, 1971, p. 142.

5. James Moffett, "Who Counts," English Journal, April, 1972, p. 571.

6. Ronald T. Hyman, Ways of Teaching, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1970), p. 276.

7. Personal correspondence from Executive Secretary, Joint Commission on Rights and Freedoms of Students, Washington, 1972.

8. Ray H. Simpson and Jerome M. Seidman, Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning, Illustrative Items for Teacher Self-Evaluative Instruments (Washington: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1962).

9. Benjamin S. Bloom, Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain (New York: David McKay Co., 1964).

10. David L. Krathwohl, et al, Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook II: Affective Domain (New York: David McKay Co., 1964).

11. Enoch I. Sawin, Evaluation and the Work of the Teacher (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1969), pp. 243-245.

12. Michael Scriven, "The Methodology of Evaluation," Perspectives of Curriculum Evaluation, ed. R. Stake (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967), pp. 108-109.